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ABSTRACT

A survey of 350 presidents at two-year colleges in the North Central Accreditation Region generated a list of their perceptions of the currently most pressing issues related to accreditation, academic transfer and vocational/technical education. A total of 162 usable responses was received. Results included the finding that the most pressing issue in each of the three areas was as follows: in accreditation, the length of time between accreditation reviews; in academic transfer, the need for a clearer definition and communication to students of the logistics of transfer credits between institutions; and in vocational/technical education, the need to maintain minimum standards of competency in both occupational and basic skills. Results are discussed, and the implications for institutional researchers are considered. A copy of the questionnaire with a summary of responses is provided. Contains 10 references. (Author/KM)

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Asking the Presidents: The Most Pressing Issues at Community Colleges in the North Central Region

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This paper was presented at the Twenty-Eighth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix Hotel, Phoenix, Arizona, May 15-18, 1988. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

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Asking the Presidents: The Most Pressing Issues at Community Colleges in the North Central Region

ABSTRACT: A survey of presidents at two-year colleges in the North Central Accreditation Region generated a list of their perceptions of the currently most pressing issues related to accreditation, academic transfer, and vocational/technical education.

Introduction and Purpose

Perhaps in response to declining enrollments, to the need for better information to improve decision making, to influence legislatures, and to refute critics, there is currently a clear movement under way to define a research agenda for community, junior, and technical colleges. Through the committee structure of AACJC, such a research agenda is "bubbling up" and will likely be part of the AACJC 1988-89 Public Policy Agenda.

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of presidents at two-year colleges in the North Central Accreditation region concerning current issues related to accreditation, academic transfer, and vocational/technical education.

Literature Review

In a recent issue of Change Magazine, George Keller categorized research on higher education as 'ineffective' (1985). His basic premise was that practitioners have little interest in the type of research currently being published. Wattenbarger questions whether researchers are addressing the important issues, by noting that available research on the key issues of community college mission and finance is lacking (1985).

Volume 56 of New Directions for Community Colleges (1986) contains chapters on the use of institutional research in such diverse areas as

strategic management, assessing the external environment, assessing institutional effectiveness, and other topics.

Several AACJC Committees have their own institutional research agenda. Martorana calls upon the AACJC Council of University and College Professors (CUC) to provide more research and scholarly support of community colleges (1986). The Urban Community College Commission is putting the final touches on a position paper describing the research priorities of colleges in urban settings (Richardson, 1985). A joint commission has been appointed by AACJC and the Association of Community Colleges Trustees (ACCT) to study national data requirements (Richardson, 1985). The AACJC Committee for the Enhancement of Institutional Research in Two-Year Colleges is working to identify the state of the profession, standards of exemplary institutional research practices, and plans for dissemination of committee findings.

The National Council for Research and Planning (NCRP), an affiliate of both AIR and AACJC, is in the second phase of a project to establish national standards of practice for institutional research in community colleges. A survey was conducted to determine current practices in the field. Currently the committee will identify exemplary practices and will conduct a survey of NCRP members concerning what "is" and what "should be" important for institutional researchers to do (Doucette, 1987). AACJC has asked NCRP to act in an advisory capacity as it works to establish a national research agenda for community college (Doucette, 1987).

The challenges facing small, rural community colleges were discussed by four presidents in the December/January AACJC Journal (Weiss et al., 1987). As the various groups work together to establish a research agenda, attention

should be given to what the chief executive officers themselves feel are their most pressing issues whenever such information is available.

Another indicator of the issues facing community colleges may be determined by aggregating the topics of the 145 sessions at the 1988 AACJC Annual Convention. There were fourteen tracks offered. The most frequently represented topics were partnerships with business and industry (17); student support services (16); use of educational technology (15); and programs for specially targeted groups (14) and student outcomes/success (14). There were 13 sessions on transfer education issues and articulation.

Data and Methodology

Statements related to accreditation, academic transfer, and vocational/technical education were developed by the planning committee of the Council of North Central Community and Junior Colleges (CNCCJC) prior to their 50th anniversary conference (Indianapolis, September 1987). Surveys were mailed to the approximately 350 CNCCJC members, who are presidents, chancellors, or chief academic officers of two-year colleges in the North Central region. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with the statements and to circle what they perceived as the "most pressing issues" within each category. The survey was administered and analyzed by the director of research and planning at a member institution. A total of 162 useable responses were received. These responses were analyzed by type and size of institution, title of respondent, and by state.

Most Pressing Issues - Accreditation

1. The length of time between accreditation reviews

2. Regional vs. national accreditation: regional accreditation is preferable to national accreditation)

3. Accreditation evaluation criteria: North Central evaluation criteria are sufficiently outcome-oriented (and should not be changed to be MORE outcome-oriented).

Most Pressing Issues - Academic Transfer

1. The logistics of transfer credits between institutions. They need to be more clearly defined and communicated to students; the "hassle" needs to be minimized.

2. Open admissions policy: does it make it difficult to attract more

3. More baccalaureate institutions are beginning to offer associate degree programs.

Most Pressing Issues - Vocational/Technical Education

1. The role of the community college in economic development.
academically talented students?

2. The need to maintain minimum standards of competency in both occupational and basic skills for all graduates of occupational programs.

3. The ability to respond rapidly to on-site delivery of needed educational programs.

4. (Expressed by metropolitan and urban members) Declining academic preparation of incoming students.

Discussion

Length of Accreditation

What is an adequate time period for accreditation? The bimodal responses suggest that many support the ten-year accreditation, while others question

that time period 'in the fast-changing educational environment.' Dr. Ted Manning told the Council that the North Central staff had discussed the importance of having a documented rationale for whatever accreditation time period is recommended. Possible Action: If a consensus can be obtained from Council members, a recommendation from the Council concerning maximum accreditation length of time could be forwarded to the North Central staff for consideration.

Transfer Education

Survey results indicate continued concern about the transfer of credits. Within the North Central region there are some states where transfer is mandated and formalized. Other states have an institution-by-institution transfer or articulation situation. Possible Action: The Council could endorse the concept of a formalized articulation transfer credit policy and forward such to both the North Central staff for consideration and the higher education governing agencies in the nineteen states of the North Central region.

Occupational Education

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that economic development is an important mission of the two-year colleges. Possibly more attention in the accreditation process should be placed on evaluating the community service and/or economic development endeavors of colleges.

Another important issue surfacing from this section of the survey was the concern that all graduates meet minimum standards of competence in both occupational and basic skills. At the same time, concern was raised that students are now enrolling who are less academically prepared. The hallmark of the community colleges has been, and continues to be, the open door admissions policy. Strong pre-college, developmental, or basic skills education remains a crucial mission of the two-year college in order to serve students with a great diversity of educational background and career goals. Possible action: The Council could establish a committee to study "competencies" in the basic skills area to determine what is the minimum level of competencies utilized by educators in the two-year colleges of the North Central region. The Council could send an endorsement of basic skills education to the North Central staff and to the governing agencies of two-year colleges in the nineteen states of the North Central region. Also, a statement could be sent to agencies that have responsibility for elementary and secondary education endorsing strong basic and occupational skills competencies.

The survey results indicated that the membership continue to support the Council's advocacy-oriented role within the North Central Association. This is seen in part by the growth of membership in the Council and the participation of two-year college personnel in Council activities. The Executive Committee will study the implications of the survey results and will decide what future actions will be undertaken.

Implications for Institutional Researchers

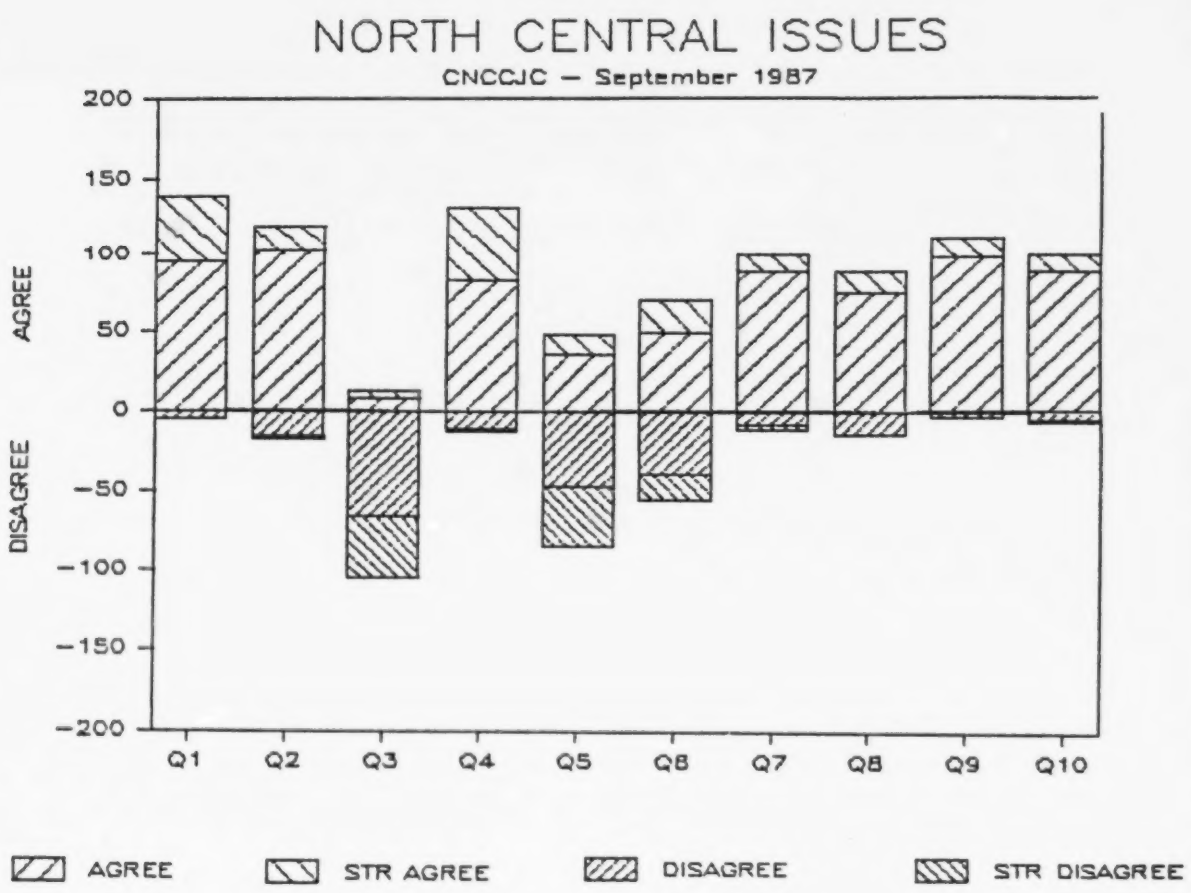
Not often do institutional researchers have to opportunity to learn what chief executive officers see as the most pressing issues. The needs of this focal group should be carefully considered when setting national research priorities and agenda.

Survey of CNCCJC Presidents and Chancellors
September 19-21, 1987

North Central Issues

			STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	I DON'T KNOW
	1.	The present North Central evaluation system meets the need for regional accreditation.	45	95	9	4	0	1
# 3	(2.)	North Central evaluation criteria are sufficiently outcome-oriented.	18	102	17	15	2	0
	3.	National accreditation rather than regional accreditation would better fulfill the accreditation purpose.	4	8	37	66	38	1
# 4	(4.)	Regional accreditation is viewed by campus people as necessary and of great importance.	50	82	8	11	2	1
# 1	(5.)	Ten year North Central accreditation is too long before another review in the fast-changing educational environment.	13	35	21	46	38	1
	6.	North Central site team members should be evaluated by the personnel of the college visited prior to the release of the team recommendation.	20	50	24	39	16	4
	7.	The Council of the North Central adequately represents the two-year colleges in the North Central Association.	11	89	30	8	3	12
# 2	(8.)	The Council of the North Central's role must be more prominent and advocacy-oriented in the North Central Association.	14	75	41	14	0	7
	9.	The Council programs at the annual North Central Association meetings are valuable.	13	98	23	3	1	14
	10.	The Annual conference of the Council of the North Central provides an adequate program for Council members.	11	88	30	5	1	17

Please Circle what you consider to be the three most pressing issues



Most Pressing Issues-North Central

1. Length of time between North Central accreditation reviews (# 5)
2. The CNCCJC must adopt a more prominent and advocacy-oriented role in the North Central Association (# 8)
3. North Central evaluation criteria ARE sufficiently outcome-oriented (and should not be changed to be more outcome-oriented) (# 2)
4. Regional accreditation is preferable to national accreditation. (# 4)

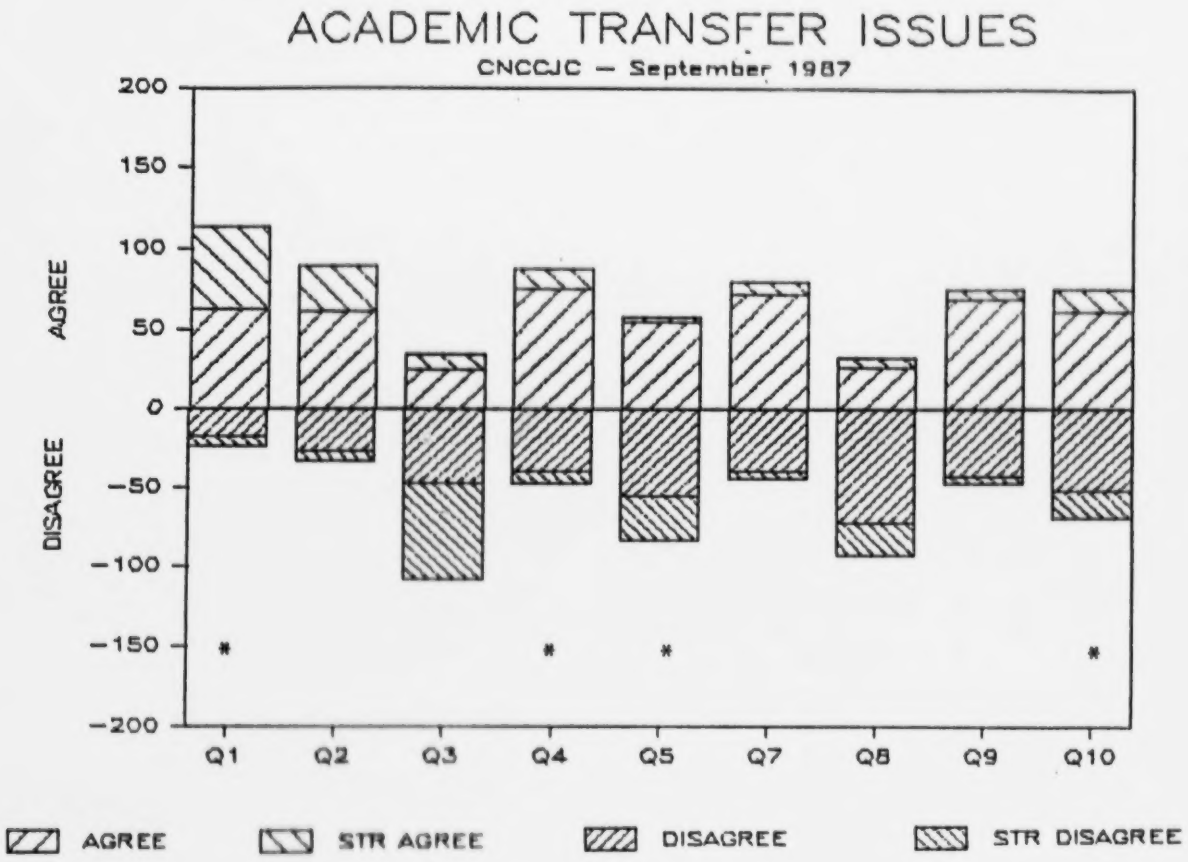
Survey conducted by Vincennes University, Vincennes, IN 47591

Survey of CNCCJC Presidents and Chancellors
September 19-21, 1987

Academic Transfer Issues

			STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	I DON'T KNOW
# 2	(1.)	The approval by the state higher education governing agencies for baccalaureate institutions to offer associate degree programs undermines the mission of community colleges.	51	62	12	17	7	4
	2.	Agencies that offer accreditation of specialized programs at the baccalaureate level but not at the associate degree level causes the associate degree to appear to be of lesser quality.	28	61	22	27	5	9
	3.	Because the objectives of associate degree academic transfer and occupational programs are so different, it is best if these programs are offered through separate administrative and instructional units within the organizational structure of community colleges.	10	25	8	47	61	2
# 3	(4.)	Some students who may otherwise enroll in community colleges choose to enroll in baccalaureate institutions simply to avoid the "hassle" of transfer of credits.	13	74	11	39	8	7
# 1	(5.)	The logistics of transfer of credits between institutions are defined and established clearly enough that inconveniences to students are minimized.	3	55	12	55	28	0
	7.	Factors such as the Educational Rights and Privacy Act make followup studies on student success difficult.	7	72	18	39	4	12
	8.	Demographic projections of fewer graduating high school seniors will have a greater impact on community colleges than on public baccalaureate institutions.	6	27	22	71	20	7
	9.	Declining enrollments will force the cancellation of many enrichment courses currently supported by larger enrollments.	6	68	24	42	4	9
# 3	(10.)	An open admissions policy creates an image problem that makes it difficult to attract more academically talented students to the community college.	15	60	9	51	17	1

Please Circle what you consider to be the three most pressing issues



Most Pressing Issues - Academic Transfer

1. The logistics of transfer of credits between institutions needs to be clearly defined and communicated to students; (# 5) the "hassle" needs to be minimized. (# 4)

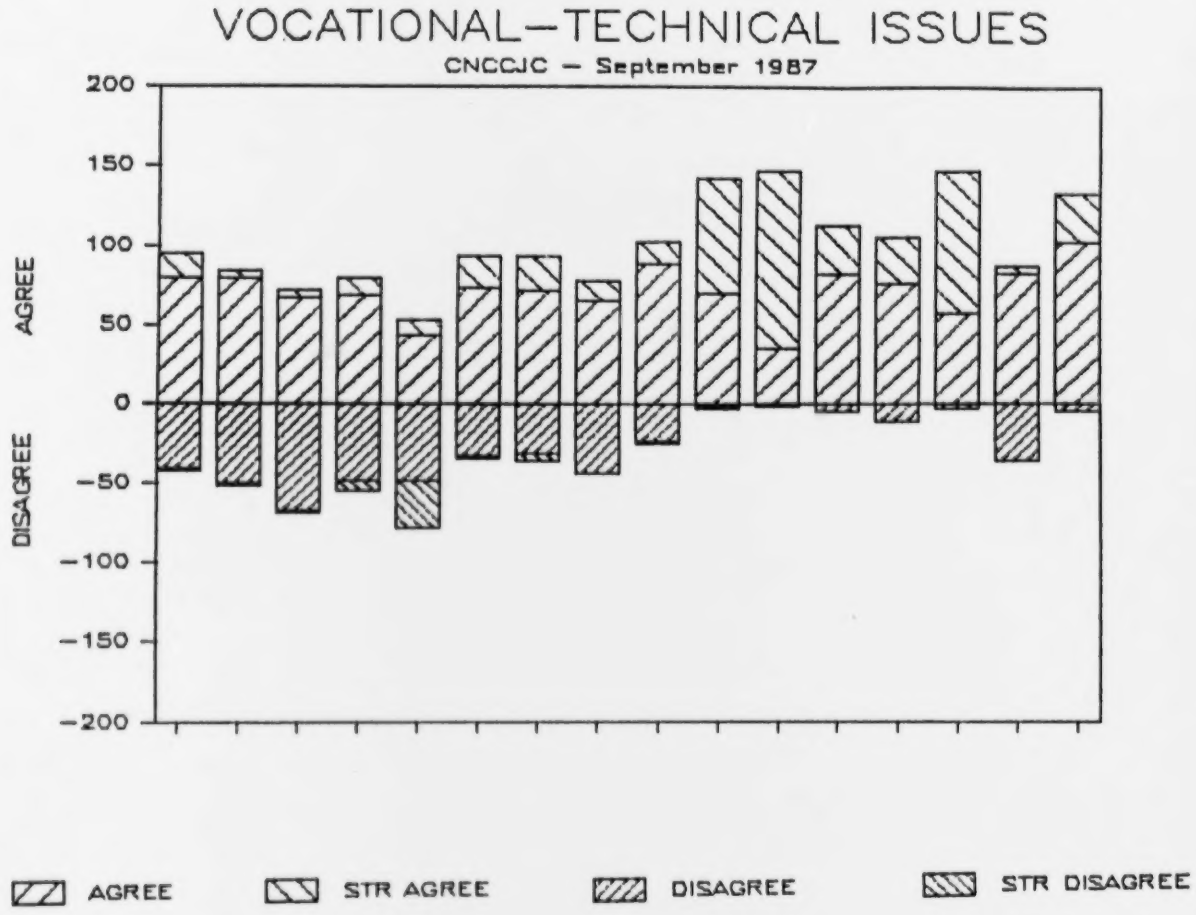
2. Does the open admissions policy make it difficult to attract more academically talented students? (# 10)

3. More baccalaureate institutions offering associate degree programs. (# 1)

Survey of CNCCJC Presidents and Chancellors
September 19-21, 1987

Vocational-Technical Education Issues

		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	I DON'T KNOW
	1. It is difficult to obtain qualified instructors for many occupational programs.	16	79	6	41	1	5
	2. Job placement of graduates is adequate.	4	80	10	49	2	3
	3. Feedback from employers on the quality of preparation of occupational graduates is adequate.	5	67	6	67	1	2
	4. Occupational education is sufficiently state-of-the-art on my campus.	10	69	10	48	7	2
	5. Governance of vocational education at the state level in my state is clearly defined and adequately supportive of community and technical colleges.	8	44	13	48	30	6
# 4	(6.) Declining academic preparation of incoming students seriously threatens to undermine the quality of graduates from occupational programs.	20	73	22	32	2	1
	7. Some standards (such as teacher/student ratios) imposed by accrediting agencies are too rigid and unnecessarily infringe on institutional autonomy.	22	72	17	31	5	3
	8. Certificate and associate degree programs offered by competitors -- including business, industry, and the military -- will seriously affect enrollment.	13	65	25	43	0	4
	9. With changes in the Perkins act and other legislative changes it will be extremely difficult to maintain programs, and particularly equipment, state-of-the-art.	14	88	16	23	2	5
# 2	(10.) All graduates of occupational programs should meet minimum standards both of occupational competency and of basic skills (reading, mathematics, written communication)	73	70	3	2	1	1
# 1	(11.) Two year colleges have an important mission in economic development.	113	35	0	1	0	1



Most Pressing Issues - Vocational/Technical Education

1. The community college's role in economic development. (# 11)
2. Minimum standards of competency in both occupational and basic skills for all graduates of occupational programs. (# 10)
3. Ability to respond rapidly to on-site delivery of needed educational programs (# 14)
4. (Expressed by metropolitan and urban institutions) Declining academic preparation of incoming students (# 6)

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	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	I DON'T KNOW
12. In order to meet the needs of society, occupational pre-employment involvement must increase.	30	83	22	4	0	10
13. There should be a renewal of "co-op" education in the occupational programs of two-year schools.	30	76	32	11	0	5
# 3 (14) Two year colleges must respond rapidly to on-site educational delivery in order to meet the needs of employees and employers.	91	57	2	3	0	1
15. Two year colleges are adequately meeting the needs of young adults who seek change in their employment.	5	82	29	36	0	2
16. Employed workers at all age levels are increasingly looking toward two year colleges for basic and technical schools.	31	103	10	5	0	3

Please Circle what you consider to be the three most pressing issues

Demographic Information

Institution of Respondent

N = (126) Community/Junior College
(16) Technological Institution
(12) Other _____

Size (Headcount)

N = (35) less than 1,500 students
(45) 1,500-3,000
(27) 3,000-5,000
(13) 5,000-10.000
(13) 10,000-20,000
(12) Over 20,000

Geographical Setting

(38) Metropolitan (500,000 residents)
(41) Urban (75,000 - 500,000 residents)
(74) Rural (less than 75,000 residents)

Primary job responsibility of the respondent (please check only one)

(119) President or Chancellor
(35) Other _____

Avg: 7.4 Total number of years in this position

Total Number of years full-time experience:

Avg. 25.2 In education
20.0 In post-secondary education
17.0 In community/junior/technical colleges
4.6 In business/industry
4.9 In state/federal government (N=43)

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